

CLOSE-UP ON HAMPTON, N.H.

BEYOND THE SEA

BOUTIQUES, STUDIOS, AND CLUBS MAKE A VISIT MORE THAN JUST A BEACH PARTY

BY SACHA PFEIFFER | GLOBE STAFF

This southern seacoast town is best known for popular Hampton Beach, which this year is celebrating its centennial as a “village district,” a designation that helped transform it into a tourist resort. In summer, the beach is a crowded, honky-tonk scene, its oceanfront boardwalk lined with souvenir shops, T-shirt vendors, arcades, and food kiosks hawking pizza, fried dough, and slush. The constant buzz of activity ranges from sand-sculpting contests to fireworks displays to free nightly concerts. Come winter, it becomes a quieter place where people stroll the sand and watch waves crash against the seawall. But Hampton is more than just its beach. The community’s tiny downtown has boutique stores, bakeries, glassmaking and pottery-painting studios, and restaurants that range from hip (for, say, wasabi-panko crusted sea scallops with apricot-jalapeno gelee) to traditional (if broiled scrod is more your style). Elsewhere, there’s an interesting complex of small museums, an apple orchard selling pies and cider doughnuts, and cruises offering deep-sea fishing and whale watching. Even when it’s not bikini season, Hampton beckons.

DO

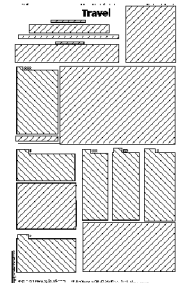
At the **Tuck Museum** (40 Park Ave., 603-929-0781, hamptonhistoricalsociety.org) — part of a modest complex that also includes a 19th-century schoolhouse, a farm museum, and a firefighting museum — the Hampton Historical Society impressively documents the history of the town, which blossomed from a village of farmers and fishermen into a tourist destination after the trolley arrived in the late 1800s. While you’re there, pick up a brochure that maps out a walking/riding tour of Hampton’s old town center, courtesy of the Hampton Heritage Commission.

More history can be found at the circa 1723 **James House** (Towle Farm Road, jameshousemuseum.org), designated a national historic site because it is the earliest surviving example of the two-room-deep, center-chimney Colonial in the state.

Hampton Beach (hamptonbeach.org) is abuzz with activities during swimsuit season, including a regatta, a seafood festival, a Miss Hampton Beach pageant, “Hampton Beach Idol” contests, and free nightly concerts. It even has its own beach cam (hamptonbeach.org/webcam.cfm). Information on water conditions, lifeguard schedules, parking, and entrance fees is available at 603-926-3784 or nhstateparks.org/ParksPages/Hampton/Hampton.html.

Visible from Hampton Beach, a cluster of tiny islands called the **Isles of Shoals** is rich with stories of shipwrecks and pirates, and cruises by the islands are offered by the **Isles of Shoals Steamship Company** (315 Market St., Portsmouth, N.H., 603-431-5550, islesofshoals.com).

Deep-sea fishing charters can be booked through **Hampton Beach Charters** (River Street, Seabrook Beach, 603-474-3461, hamptonbeachcharters.com).



PARTY

The convivial tavern at the **Old Salt** (490 Lafayette Road, 603-926-8322, oldsaltnh.com), which also houses a more formal sit-down restaurant, is a great place to watch a game, eat free popcorn, and indulge in colorful cocktails.

On the waterfront, **La Bec Rouge** (73 Ocean Blvd., 603-926-5050, labecrouge.com) is popular for its oceanview deck, “underground pub,” and nightly live entertainment.

The **Boardwalk Inn & Cafe** (139 Ocean Blvd., 603-929-7400, boardwalkinns.com), besides offering dining and lodging, has two levels of nightly entertainment.

Despite its name, there’s no gambling at the **Casino Ballroom** (169 Ocean Blvd., 603-929-4100, casinoballroom.com), which has been in existence since 1899, back when “casino” referred generally to a social gathering place. Today, it’s a musical venue with about 2,000 seats, and this summer’s eclectic lineup ranges from Deep Purple to Umphrey’s McGee & Yonder Mountain String Band.

FUEL

For a casual, family-friendly meal, **Me & Ollie’s Cafe** (61 High St., 603-926-0036) is an ideal choice. It’s a roomy, cheery place where kids can munch on Fluffernutters and play in the activity corner while their parents eat pesto veggie grilled panini at proper tables. It also makes very good breads, cookies, pastries, and granola.

Amelia’s Bistro (471 Lafayette Road, 603-929-7873) is similarly laid-back but has more hot food offerings, including homemade meatballs, stuffed peppers, and shrimp scampi.

Fast Eddie’s (320 Lafayette Road, 603-926-2314), a replica 1950s diner, is a faux blast to the past serving burgers, subs, and comfort foods like meatloaf and pork chops.

Around since 1970, the **Galley Hatch** (325 Lafayette Road, 603-926-6152, galleyhatch.com) is a spacious sit-down restaurant with something for every appetite and budget, and also houses an upscale food market called **Provisions**.

Sleek, contemporary **Hagan’s Grill** (6 High St., 603-926-5668) serves fancy meals like sesame-crusted yellow fin tuna with citrus-shoyu glaze and Asian slaw. And along the Ocean Boulevard boardwalk, there’s a plethora of clam shacks, burger joints, pizzerias, sub shops, and pub grub joints.

REST

Hampton Beach is lined with hotels and motels that range from respectable to shabby. Among the fancier choices is **Ashworth by the Sea** (295 Ocean Blvd., 603-926-6762, ashworthhotel.com), which has in-house dining and function rooms. The **Beach View Inn** (101 Ocean Blvd., 603-926-2520, beachviewinn.com) has a mezzanine-level deck and 28 kitchenette-equipped rooms and suites. Check out more beachfront options at hamptonbeachresorts.com.

In downtown Hampton, **Lamie's Inn** (490 Lafayette Road, 603-926-8322, lamiesinn.com), connected to the **Old Salt** restaurant and tavern, has 32 rooms in a former farmhouse. If you prefer a bed-and-breakfast, the **Victoria Inn** (430 High St., 603-929-1437, thevictoriainn.com) has six guest rooms located only a half-mile from the beach. Or rough it at the 28-site **Hampton Beach State Park RV Campground** (Route 1A at the Seabrook/Hampton line, 603-271-3628). Additional RV sites, as well as tent sites, can be found at **Wakeda Campground** (294 Exeter Road, 603-772-5274, wakedacampground.com) in Hampton Falls.

PLAY

This year, the free annual **Hampton Beach Children's Festival**, to be held Aug. 13-17, kicks off with a magic show on the Seashell Stage and ends with a giant costume parade. In between will be mini-golf, sand castle building competitions, a talent show, dancing, storytellers, and more.

Amusement arcades await you at **Funarama** (beneath the Casino Ballroom, 169 Ocean Blvd., 603-926-2381) and **Playland** (211 Ocean Blvd., 603-926-3831). The Casino complex also includes the **Casino Cascade Water Slide** and **Casino Mini Golf**.

For a break from the water, visit the 300-acre **Applecrest Farm Orchards** (133 Exeter Road, Hampton Falls, 603-926-3721, applecrest.com), where you can pick your own apples and pumpkins, enjoy storybook hay rides, and shop at the farm market.

On a rainy day, take a class in making stained glass at **Accents in Glass** (70 High St., 603-929-9113, accents-in-glass.com), a studio and store. Or paint a keepsake plate, mug, or decorative artwork at **Pottery at Your Place** (70 High St., 603-926-1122, potteryatyourplace.com), which also offers classes for kids.

SPEND

Handmade pottery is sold at **Great Bay Pottery** (69 Lafayette Road, North Hampton, 603-964-1118, greatbaypottery.com), where you can watch the glazing and firing process take place.

Appledore Arbor (225 Atlantic Ave., 603-964-4486, appledorearbor.com) specializes in home furnishings, bedding, and home accessories that lend a vintage cottage feel.

Downtown Hampton has several boutique clothing stores, including **All She Wears** (461 Lafayette Road, 603-929-0055) and **Sunny Daze Boutique** (15 High St., 603-926-0189). **Present Perfect** (457 Lafayette Road, 603-926-3340), whose motto is "Let us help make your present a perfect one," offers an eclectic mishmash of furniture, clothing, jewelry, and artisan-made crafts.

Tranquility is the theme at **Peaceful Life** (12 High St., 603-929-6200, peacefullifellc.com), which stocks its shelves with candles, body products, yoga items, and other knickknacks combining style and serenity.

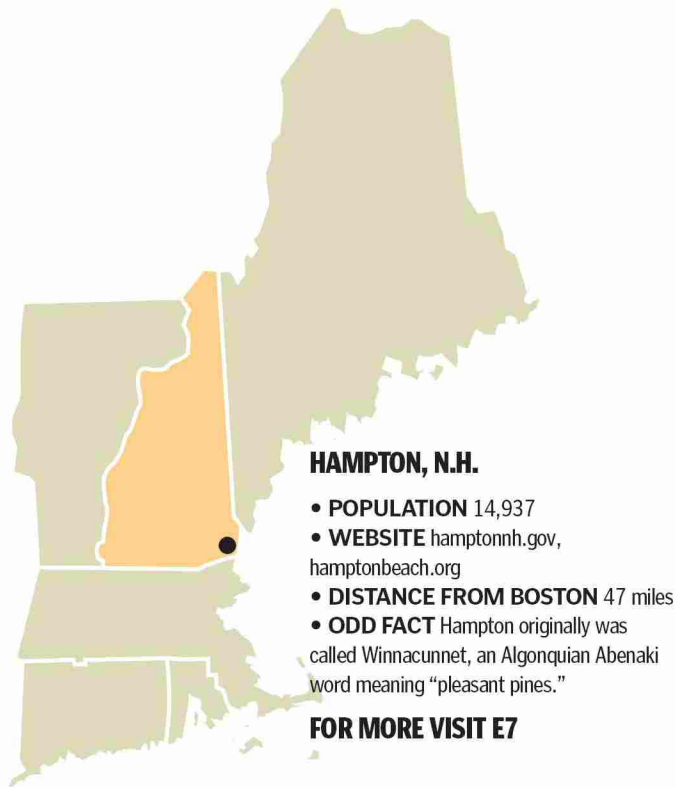
For sustenance after all that shopping, munch on homemade chocolates at **Sanborn's Candies** (293 Lafayette Road, 603-926-5061, sanbornscandies.com). Or pamper yourself at **Eight Winds** (580 Lafayette Road, 603-929-2999, eightwindswellness.com), a day spa offering seaweed wraps, salt glows, and Thai coconut scrubs.



Strollers enjoy ice cream and shaved ice while window-shopping along the boardwalk at Hampton Beach.



Clams and lobster are on the menu at the Old Salt restaurant.





PHOTOS BY JASON JOHNS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Tim Stowell, 10, of Clinton tries to outrun a wave as he plays with his friends on Hampton Beach.